

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

Isaac Asimov, the prolific science-fiction writer once said: “The only constant is change, continuing change, inevitable change; that is the dominant factor in society today. No sensible decision can be made any longer without taking into account not only the world as it is, but the world as it will be.” Many others have said the same thing in various ways over the years. Asimov was actually only quoting or echoing a Greek philosopher who lived somewhere around 535-475 BC. His name was Herakleitos, and he said, “nothing endures but change”. Yet it doesn’t take a famous author or an ancient philosopher to tell us what we know all too well. While I’ve heard that there’s a small town in Nevada where so little ever changes that the local radio station is still running last year’s weather forecasts, that is not the norm for most people. Our lives are filled with change—change that sometimes comes so quickly and so overwhelmingly upon us that we can’t deal with it all. That seems to be even more pronounced in the midst of our COVID days, as each and every new day seems to bring new changes into our lives.

There is a hymn that says: *Through all the changing scenes of life, In trouble and in joy, The praises of my God shall still My heart and tongue employ.* (TLH 29, st. 1) We can’t stop the reality of change. But the more things change, the more our great and gracious God stays the same. He, who has saved us and who loves us with an everlasting love revealed so powerfully and fully as God the Son dies on the cross for us, will continue to be with us to see us through each and every day, and through all the changes of our lives.

In the hymn, “Abide With Me”, the author says, “*Change and decay in all around I see*”. (LSB 878, st. 4) Change surrounds us. It is with us all the time. Think of all the things that have changed in your lifetime! Of course, the older you are, the more change you have seen. There are people who remember when the only way to get across the ocean was by ship—but now planes make the trip in a matter of hours. It is said that there has been more technological change in the last 100 years than in the rest of human history—and with that advancement and progress comes the simple reality of change.

There are changes in life that have brought some improvements and are worthy of note. I like the fact that I can type my sermons on a word processor and correct them rather simply. If you want to see what they looked like back in the days when I had a student Smith-Corona typewriter, I still have some file copies somewhere. I like the fact that I can pick up a telephone and be in contact with friends in Edmonton or Moose Jaw. It’s great to be able to video chat with my children and grandchildren in Ontario. But I don’t like the fact that there has been a wholesale moral change in our world that is not only distressing—it is causing harm to our society that people have not yet begun to understand. God calls us to treasure life from conception until natural death. Yet our world aborts babies, and condones the idea of ending life when we determine it isn’t worth living. Things that we once considered taboo, especially in terms of human sexuality are now held as normal; in fact, it has become taboo to speak against them! Faith is now viewed as a negative, but a world without God is only hastening its road to destruction.

Yes, it seems that nothing endures but change. Our lives change in far too many ways on a daily basis. Some change is truly unavoidable and natural. We look forward to some change. When we are small, we can’t wait until we are big, so that we can stay up late or have a bigger piece of steak or even drink a beer. Then suddenly, we’ve gone through the years of our lives and we wonder why we can’t do the things we used to do, like party all night or run up and down the stairs like we once did.

Social scientists have studied the affects of change in our lives, and most of the changes are measured through a stress scale. The top 10 changes that bring stress are typically determined to be: death of spouse; divorce; marital separation; detention in jail or other institution; death of a close family member; major personal injury or illness; getting married; being fired at work; reconciling with your mate; retirement from work. Those are only the top ten, but we may also face changes in our financial status, or the fact that we have to move to a new home, a new city, a new job. We live in a rapidly changing world, and the truth is that most of that change is negative, not positive.

The more things change, the more the words of our text become so important and comforting. Our dear Saviour says to us:

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. What a gracious invitation that is! The Lord of Life calls us to come, just as we are, with all the burdens and cares of our lives, and find rest in His love and care. He calls us in the midst of the multitude changes of life to stop and talk with Him in prayer, so that He can help us. He calls us out of the hectic change of life to the quiet rest of worship, as He comes here to guide us, feed us and strengthen us for all that still lies before us. He calls us to share the load of our lives with Him, that He may lift us up and help us through.

And yet, we often feel overwhelmed (which is exactly what the devil wants us to feel) because we haven't turned to the One who is our help in the midst of life's change. Sometimes we are proud and boastful, thinking we can do it all on our own. It is only when things are already more than we can bear that we go to God. Sometimes we think that things can't stay this way for very long, but we forget that the power of sin—sin in the world, sin in the people around us, and sin in our own hearts—keeps things from getting better. In our epistle lesson, Paul said: **For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.** (Romans 7:18-19 - ESV) The one thing we really need to change is the one thing we are powerless to change.

That, my dear people loved by God, is why the words of the Lord continue to bring us hope. We can't fix life. We can't change our sinful hearts. We can't cope with all the changes of life on our own. But we can deal with the heavy burdens of life when we cling to the Saviour. The psalmist said: **I sought the Lord, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed. This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them.** (Psalm 34:4-7 - ESV)

No matter what this world may bring, no matter how much life may change, our God is with us, and He will deliver us. The heaviest and greatest burden of our lives is our sin. Thankfully, we know that Jesus came and bore that burden for us on the cross. He takes the heavy load away and forgives us. In Jesus, our dear Saviour we find perfect forgiveness and a release from the heavy weight of our sin and shame. But His work doesn't stop at the cross. We have the assurance of all His love and grace through His resurrection from the dead. He gives us a victory that lifts us above the changes of this life. That is why St. Paul can assure us through the Holy Spirit: **"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"** (Romans 8:31-32, ESV)

Although everything else may change, we never have to worry that God's love for us in Christ will change. We have this blessed assurance: **Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.** (Hebrews 13:8 - ESV) He overcame the world for us. He faced the full punishment of divine justice to set us free. Now He calls us to come and be at rest in Him. This is where we find the strength to cope with all the changes that life brings. Our strength is in our God. Again, we hear the psalmist say: **Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.** (Psalm 34:19 - ESV)

In a world that is constant flux and change, we joke about the fact that Lutherans aren't good with change. After all, how many Lutherans does it take to change a lightbulb? What do you mean, change? There are some things that we do not want to change. We do not want to change the Word of God or surrender any of His life-giving truth. As His church, we want to boast that we have been under the same management for over 2,000 years. Jesus tells us: **For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.** (Matthew 5:18 - ESV) He also says: **I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.** (Revelation 3:11 - ESV)

We cannot avoid the changes of the world—but we can overcome them. When we cling to the Saviour, trusting His Word of promise, we **find rest for [our] souls.** Yes, we rest in this glorious truth: the more things change, the more He stays the same. Amen.